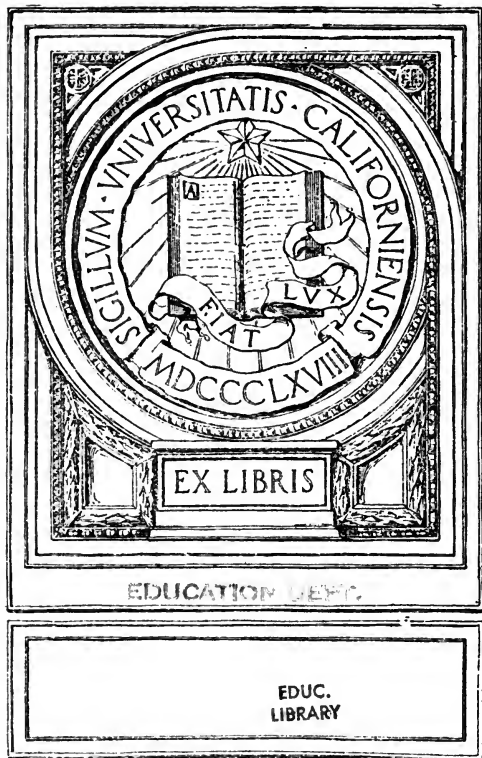


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VIII. VOCATIONAL GUIDANCE

MEYER BLOOMFIELD

Director of the Vocation Bureau of Boston

When the Civic Service House, a social settlement in the crowded North End of Boston, invited the late Professor Frank Parsons, in October, 1908, to undertake a work of personally advising with the young men and women who attended its clubs and classes it soon found an outside call for such service to a degree which taxed the strength of the adviser and the resources of the institution.

So thoroughly did Professor Parsons conceive and outline his work, so detailed and even scientific were his methods of consultation, that before very long there literally came to him a country-wide demand for information and personal help. He was spared only long enough to write his *Choosing a Vocation*, the first modern work on this subject.

After his death, one of Boston's leading merchants and a number of public-spirited men and women decided to organize the work of vocational advising on a scale adequate to the demands which kept increasing. Mrs. Pauline Agassiz Shaw, the founder of the Civic Service House, and the writer, who for ten years had been its director, co-operated in this effort. Later the writer secured a leave of absence from settlement duties in order to direct the development of the new Vocation Bureau.

On May 4, 1909, Mr. Edward A. Filene, as one of the moving spirits of the civic movement known as Boston 1915, received the following letter from the secretary of the Boston School Board:

DEAR SIR: I respectfully call your attention to the following order which was passed by the School Committee at a meeting held yesterday evening.

"Ordered, that the Boston-1915 Committee be requested to secure the co-operation of the Vocation Bureau for the purpose of assisting graduates of the public schools of this city in choosing wisely the most appropriate employment, etc."

On May 12, after a conference in the Boston-1915 office, the Executive Committee of the Vocation Bureau sent the following statement of its plan of co-operation to the School Board:

First, The Vocation Bureau will employ a Vocational Director to give practically his entire time to the organization of vocational counsel for the graduates of the Boston Public Schools during the ensuing year;

Second, The work of this Vocational Director shall be carried on in co-operation with the Boston School Committee or the Superintendent of Schools, as the committee shall see fit;

Third, It is the plan of the Bureau to have this Vocational Director organize a conference of the masters and teachers of the Boston High Schools through the School Committee or through the Superintendent of Schools, for the purpose of providing that members of the graduating classes will be met for vocational advice either by this Vocational Director or by the co-operating schoolmasters and teachers, all working along a general plan, to be adopted by this conference.

Fourth, This Vocational Director should, in co-operation with the Superintendent of Schools or any person whom he may appoint, arrange vocational trips and vocational lectures for the members of the graduating classes.

Fifth, The Bureau believes that schoolmasters and teachers should be definitely trained to give vocational counsel, and therefore that it is advisable for this Vocational Director, in co-operation with the Superintendent of Schools, to establish a series of conferences to which certain selected teachers and masters in the schools shall be invited on condition that they will agree in turn definitely to do vocational counseling with their own pupils.

On Monday, June 7, the Boston School Committee having adopted the vocational guidance plans submitted, instructed the superintendent to appoint a school committee of three masters and three sub-masters to meet regularly with the director of the Vocation Bureau. This committee has been holding weekly meetings at the office of the Bureau, and its report after a year of service deserves quoting. Among its more important statements and recommendations are the following:

The Committee on Vocational Direction respectfully presents the following as a report for the school year just closed. The past year has been a year of beginnings, the field of operation being large and the problems complicated. A brief survey of the work shows the following results:

A general interest in vocational direction has been aroused among the teachers of Boston, not only in the elementary but in the high schools.

A vocational counselor, or a committee of such counselors, has been appointed in every high school and in all but one of the elementary schools.

A vocational record card of every elementary-school graduate for this year has been made, to be forwarded to the high school in the fall.

Stimulating vocational lectures have been given to thirty of the graduating

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classes of the elementary schools of Boston, including all the schools in the more congested parts of the city.

Much has been done by way of experiment by the members of this committee in the various departments of getting employment, counseling, and following up the pupils after leaving school.

The interest and loyal co-operation of many of the leading philanthropic societies of Boston have been secured, as well as that of many prominent in the business and professional life of the city and the state.

A good beginning has already been made in reviewing books suitable for vocational libraries in schools.

It was early decided that we should confine our efforts for the first year mainly to pupils of the highest elementary grade as the best point of contact. The problem of vocational aid and counsel in the high schools has not as yet been directly dealt with, yet much that is valuable has been accomplished in all our high schools on the initiative of the head-masters and selected teachers. It is safe to say that the quality and amount of vocational aid and direction has far exceeded any hitherto given in those schools. The committee, through open and private conferences, and correspondence with the head-masters, have kept in close touch with the situation in high schools, but they feel that for the present year it is best for the various types of high schools each to work out its own plan of vocational direction. The facts regarding their experience can properly be made the basis of a later report. A committee of three, appointed by the Head-masters' Association, stands ready to advise with this committee on all matters relating to high-school vocational interests. Once during the year the principals of the specialized high schools met in conference the vocational counselors of the city and have presented the aims and the curricula of the schools in such a way as to greatly enlighten those responsible for advising pupils just entering high schools.

The committee have held regular weekly meetings through the school year since September. At these meetings every phase of vocational aid has been discussed, together with its adaptability to our present educational system. Our aim has been to test the various conclusions before recommending them for adoption. This has taken time. Our most serious problem so far has been to adapt our plans to conditions as we find them, without increasing the teachers' work and without greatly increased expense. We have assumed that the movement was not a temporary "fad," but that it had a permanent value, and was therefore worthy the serious attention of educators.

Three aims have stood out above all others: first, to secure thoughtful consideration, on the part of parents, pupils, and teachers, of the importance of a life-career motive; second, to assist in every way possible in placing pupils in some remunerative work on leaving school; and third, to keep in touch with and help them thereafter, suggesting means of improvement and watching

the advancement of those who need such aid. The first aim has been in some measure achieved throughout the city. The other two have thus far been worked out only by the individual members of the committee. As a result we are very firmly of the opinion that until some central bureau of information for pupils regarding trade and mercantile opportunities is established, and some effective system of sympathetically following up pupils for a longer or a shorter period after leaving school is organized in our schools as centers, the effort to advise and direct merely will largely fail. Both will require added executive labor which will fall upon the teachers first. We believe they will accept the responsibility. If, as Dr. Eliot says, teachers will find those schools more interesting where the life-career motive is present, then the sooner that motive is discovered in the majority of pupils the more easily will the day's work be done and the product correspondingly improved.

In order to enlist the interest and co-operation of the teachers of Boston, three mass meetings—one in October and two in the early spring—were held. A fourth meeting with the head-masters of high schools was also held with the same object. As a most gratifying result the general attitude is most sympathetic and the enthusiasm marked. The vocation counselors in high and elementary schools form a working organization of over one hundred teachers, representing all the schools. A responsible official, or committee, in each school stands ready to advise pupils and parents at times when they most need advice and are asking for it. They suggest whatever helps may be available in further educational preparation. They are ready to fit themselves professionally to do this work more intelligently and discriminatingly, not only by meeting together for mutual counsel and exchange of experience but by study and expert preparation if need be.

As a beginning of our work with pupils we have followed out two lines: the lecture and the card record. The addresses have been mainly stimulating and inspirational. It seems to the committee, however, that specific information coming from those intimately connected with certain lines of labor should have a place also in this lecture phase of our work. In a large number of high and elementary schools addresses of this character have been given by experts during the year. The committee claim no credit for these, though carried out under the inspiration of the movement the committee represent. The custom of having such addresses given before Junior Alumni Associations, Parents' Associations, and evening school gatherings has become widespread, the various masters taking the initiative in such cases. The speakers are able to quote facts with an authority that is convincing to the pupil and leads him to take a more serious view of his future plans, especially if the address is followed up by similar talks from the class teacher, emphasizing the points of the speaker. This is a valuable feature and should be extended to include more

of the elementary grades, especially in the more densely settled portions of the city, from which most of our unskilled workers come.

A vocational record card, calling for elementary-school data on one side and for high-school data on the other, has been furnished all the elementary schools for registration of this year's graduates. The same card will be furnished to high schools this fall. These cards are to be sent forward by the elementary-school counselors to high schools in September, to be revised twice during the high-school course. The value of the card record is not so much in the registering of certain data as in the results of the process of getting these. The effect upon the mental attitude of pupil, teacher, and parent is excellent, and makes an admirable beginning in the plan of vocational direction.

The committee are now in a position where they must meet a demand of both pupils and teachers for vocational enlightenment. Pupils should have detailed information in the form of inexpensive handbooks regarding the various callings and how to get into them, wages, permanence of employment, chance of promotion, etc. Teachers must have a broader outlook upon industrial opportunities for boys and girls. Even those teachers who know their pupils will generally have little acquaintance with industrial conditions. The majority can advise fairly well how to prepare for a profession, while few can tell a boy how to get into a trade or what the opportunities therein are. In this respect our teachers will need to be more broadly informed regarding social, industrial, and economic problems. We have to face a more serious problem in a crowded American city than in a country where children are supposed to follow the father's trade.

In meeting the two most pressing needs, viz., the vocational enlightenment of teachers, parents, and pupils, and the training of vocational counselors, we shall continue to look for aid to the Vocation Bureau. The Bureau has been of much assistance during the past year, in fact indispensable, in matters of correspondence, securing information, getting out printed matter, and in giving the committee counsel based upon a superior knowledge of men and conditions in the business world.

The question of vocational direction is merely one phase of the greater question of vocational education. As a contributory influence we believe serious aggressive work in this line will lead to several definite results, aside from the direct benefit to the pupils. It will create a demand for better literature on the subject of vocations. It will help increase the demand for more and better trade schools. It will cause teachers to seek to broaden their knowledge of opportunities for mechanical and mercantile training. Lastly, it will tend to a more intelligent and generous treatment of employees by business houses, the personal welfare and prospects of the employee being taken into account as well as the interests of the house itself.

What has given rise to the nation-wide interest in the subject of vocational guidance? Advising with young people as to their future is not a new thing. The teacher has long been the child's counselor. Parents have always felt the deepest concern in this vital matter. What is the reason for a separate and specialized organization's undertaking a service so intimate and personal? Reflection must convince one that personal and individual effort, however invaluable, cannot deal adequately with modern conditions. Tenement homes, a large immigrant population as yet unacquainted with the possibilities of the new country, large school classes, and complex conditions of commerce and industry give rise to a situation which, besides friendly sentiment, needs facts, organization, and even science to understand and cope with.

We are living in the midst of a restless period, impatient with crudeness, and too preoccupied to pause over the stumblings and gropings of its bewildered youth. Into this arena of tense effort, the schools of our country send out their annual thousands. We somehow trust that the tide of opportunity may carry them to some vocational destination. Only the relatively few who reach the higher training institutions can be said to have their problems at least temporarily solved during the critical period of adolescence. A multitude are sent out to cope with the new conditions of self-support. Whose business is it to follow up the results of this transition from school to work? Whose business is it to audit our social accounts and discover how far our costly enterprises in education, the pain, the thought, the skill, and the sacrifice we put forth with the growing generation are well or ill invested in the field of occupation? The higher training schools are as profoundly concerned in this problem as are the elementary schools. The well-to-do are no less affected than the poor. Until society faces the question of the life careers of its youth, the present vocational anarchy will continue to beset the young work-seekers.

It is clear that we have slighted that part of a youth's life which marks the serious and critical transition from school to work, from the shelter of social care to the liberties and responsibilities of wage-earning. And we naturally expect therefore certain definite consequences of this neglect.

To some extent there is a reason for the meagerness of attention to this matter. Educational policies have not been so perfected as to afford those concerned with them the freedom and the leisure to regard much else, however pressing. Indeed it is fair to say that many a strong

word has come from the friends of school children who have been realizing the pitiful futility of spending all we do for our children with the certain prospect of nullifying for many whatever benefits have been gained during school life.

To the public as a whole, and not to any group of people, does the responsibility for making good the child's investment of its training lie. Vocational guidance presents itself as a community problem.

An important step in this direction was the organization in Boston of the Vocation Bureau, the first of the kind in the country. The men and women behind it, leaders in commerce, industry, education, and social service, appreciated keenly the present misdirection and waste in the critical transition from school to work. They saw that choice of a vocation is impossible to young people ignorant of the conditions of success and efficiency in the modern working world, and understood that neither school life nor working life could serve to best advantage unless training, information, and purpose were brought to those in need of them. Thousands of children leave school for work, not to follow a calling, but to get a job. Unguided, unprepared, and uninformed they find themselves in a condition of vocational anarchy. The social loss of all this, as discovered by reports, statistics, and observable consequences, is appalling. Our children are "pitch-forked into the working world," as Charles Booth has said. To lessen this social waste, to furnish necessary information about various occupations and their advantages and disadvantages and the training necessary for efficiency in them, to broaden the range of choice, and to deepen the "life-career motive" in education and in employment, the Vocation Bureau was organized. The main interest of the Bureau is not the employment of youth, however favorable and pleasurable the opportunity, but its best social investment. Underlying all its endeavors is the realization that a longer period in school and continued training are fundamental to achievement in every desirable occupation.

In accordance with this plan 117 teachers were appointed to serve as vocational counselors, and the opportunities open to boys and girls were fully discussed in a course of lectures and discussions conducted by the vocational director. Among the subjects presented were:

The Principles of Vocational Guidance.

The Shoe Industry.

The Boy and Girl in the Department Store.

The Sources and Methods of Vocational Guidance.
The Machine Industry.
A Group of Trades for Boys.
The Telephone Industry for Girls.
Stenography and Typewriting for Girls.
Bookbinding for Girls.
Architecture.
The Use of Statistics.

To supplement these discussions the Bureau has made a study of some forty or fifty Boston occupations, and a series of bulletins has been issued to the school counselors including among other titles:

The Machinist.
Banking.
The Baker.
Confectionery Manufacture.
The Architect.
The Landscape Architect.
The Grocer.
The Department Store.

This year's series of talks to school counselors will include:

For Boys:

The Machine Trades.
Agriculture.
Mechanical and Civil Engineering.
Electrical Engineering.
Textile Mill Working.
The Building Trades.
The Selling Clerk.

For Girls:

The Needle Trades.
Opportunities in the Department Store.
Conditions in Industry for the Young Girl Wage-Earner 14-16 Years Old.
Vocational Opportunities for the Girl Who Completes the High School.

The results of this work have been extremely important and the usefulness of vocational guidance has become definitely established. Fundamentally, vocational guidance aims to fit the boy and girl for their work and, what is equally important, to make their work fit for the boy and the girl. School life and working life are asked to co-operate in making the most of youth's possibilities. This is a service in behalf of efficient democracy; for work and school must join hands in fitting the future citizen for the highest and best achievements.





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